

CHP investigates influenza A outbreaks at residential care home for persons with disabilities and primary school

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (January 9) investigating two influenza A outbreaks at a residential care home for persons with disabilities (RCHD) in Tuen Mun and a primary school in Kowloon City, and again reminded the public to maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene against influenza.

The outbreak at the RCHD involves 21 male residents aged 44 to 70 and one female staff member. They have developed fever, cough and sore throat since December 27. All sought medical attention. Among them, 11 required hospitalisation and eight of them were discharged following treatment. All patients are in a stable condition.

The respiratory specimens of eight residents tested positive for influenza A virus upon laboratory testing.

Separately, the outbreak at the primary school involves eight boys and 12 girls, aged 7 to 10, who have developed fever, cough and sore throat since January 2. All of them sought medical attention but none required hospitalisation. All patients are in a stable condition.

The respiratory specimen of one affected student tested positive for influenza A virus upon laboratory testing.

Officers of the CHP have conducted site visits to the RCHD and the primary school and advised them to adopt necessary infection control measures against respiratory infections. They have been put under medical surveillance.

"Hong Kong has entered the 2018-19 winter influenza season. We anticipate that local seasonal influenza activity will continue to rise in the coming weeks and remain at an elevated level for some time. Members of the public should remain vigilant for protection against influenza," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Particularly, children, people aged 50 to 64 years, the elderly and those with underlying illnesses who have not yet received influenza vaccination this season are urged to get vaccinated as early as possible to prevent seasonal influenza as it takes about two weeks for antibodies to develop in the body after vaccination. They should promptly seek medical advice if influenza-like symptoms develop so that appropriate treatment can be initiated as early as possible to prevent potential complications. Parents and carers are reminded to render assistance in prevention, care and control for vulnerable people," the spokesman added.

Besides receiving seasonal influenza vaccination as early as possible for personal protection, the public should maintain good personal and environmental hygiene for protection against influenza and other respiratory illnesses. For more information, please visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [Flu Express](#).

LCQ18: HKSAR Government attaches great importance to combating trafficking in persons

Following is a question by the Hon Dennis Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

After reviewing the periodic reports submitted under various international human rights treaties by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) through the Central People's Government, a number of committees under the United Nations (UN) have consistently noted and criticized the insufficient efforts of the HKSAR Government in combating human trafficking, and they have recommended the HKSAR Government to step up its efforts in this respect. Meanwhile, the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report) published by the Department of State of the United States has found that Hong Kong does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons, and has placed HKSAR on "Tier 2 Watch List" for three consecutive years since 2016. The 2018 TIP Report has noted that the HKSAR Government did not demonstrate increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. HKSAR would have been downgraded to Tier 3 automatically had a waiver not been granted to HKSAR due to the HKSAR Government's promulgation of the Action Plan to Tackle Trafficking in Persons and to Enhance Protection of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (Action Plan) which, according to the 2018 TIP Report, if implemented, would constitute significant efforts to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the steps it has taken or planned to take to implement each of the recommendations put forth by the following UN committees as set out in the table below:

(i) paragraphs 85 and 97 of the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on the report of People's Republic of China (Including Hong Kong and Macao) submitted under the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and adopted by the Committee in 2005;

(ii) paragraph 88 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the report of China (including Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions) submitted under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and adopted by the Committee in 2005;

(iii) paragraph 20 of the concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee, on the third periodic report of Hong Kong, China, submitted under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by People's Republic of China, and adopted by the Committee in 2013;

(iv) paragraphs 45 and 46 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China submitted under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and adopted by the Committee in 2013;

(v) paragraphs 56 and 57 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of China submitted under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and adopted by the Committee in 2014;

(vi) paragraphs 20 and 21 of the concluding observations of the Committee Against Torture, on the fifth periodic report of China with respect to Hong Kong, China submitted under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and adopted by the Committee in 2016; and

(vii) paragraphs 48 and 49 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China (including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China) submitted under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and adopted by the Committee in 2018;

UN committees' recommendations	Steps taken/ planned to be taken
(i)	
(ii)	
(iii)	
(iv)	
(v)	
(vi)	
(vii)	

(2) of the specific measures in the Action Plan through which the Government implements the recommendations for HKSAR set out in the TIP Reports, and

whether the Government has carried out those measures; if not, whether and when it will do so;

(3) whether any measures in the Action Plan can be implemented only if additional financial and human resources are provided to the government departments concerned; if so, of the details of the resources needed, and whether the resources have been sought and obtained; if not, when and from whom they will be sought;

(4) of the results expected to be achieved by each of the measures in the Action Plan;

(5) whether it has set criteria to assess or evaluate the effectiveness of the measures in the Action Plan; if so, of the details, and whether it has made such assessments or evaluations; if so, of the outcome; if not, whether and when it will do so; and

(6) whether there are other measures through which it implements the recommendations for HKSAR set out in the TIP Reports; if so, whether it has carried out those measures; if not, whether and when it will do so?

Reply:

President,

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a heinous crime which is not tolerated in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) has always spared no effort in combating the crime. In order to provide high-level policy steer on the overall strategy and measures to tackle TIP and enhance protection of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs), the HKSARG established in March 2018 a high-level inter-bureau/departmental Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, with the Secretary for Security and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare as vice chairmen. Membership of the Steering Committee includes heads of the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), Immigration Department (ImmD), Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), Labour Department (LD) and Social Welfare Department (SWD), as well as Director of Public Prosecutions of the Department of Justice (DoJ). At the same time, the Government promulgated the Action Plan to Tackle Trafficking in Persons and to Enhance Protection of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (Action Plan), which outlines a package of multi-faceted measures that are comprehensive, strategic and targeted, covering multiple areas including victim identification, investigation, enforcement, prosecution, victim protection and support, prevention, and partnership with different stakeholders, etc.

Our reply (prepared in consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and other relevant policy bureaux and departments) to the Hon Kwok's question is as follows.

(1) There are a total of 15 United Nations (UN) human rights conventions applicable to Hong Kong, among which seven conventions require submission of

periodic reports. The HKSARG prepares reports regularly as required to explain the latest developments in relevant areas in Hong Kong and respond to recommendations made by the relevant UN committees, so that the committees can grasp Hong Kong's actual situation, as well as progress made and challenges faced by Hong Kong in various aspects.

In the concluding observations quoted in Part (1)(i) to (vii) in the question, the relevant committees' recommendations on combatting TIP mainly cover the following areas.

1. Enhance victim identification: The HKSARG kept strengthening and improving the relevant mechanism in the past few years. ImmD first launched a TIP victim screening mechanism in 2015. The mechanism was then gradually extended to some police districts and some formations of the C&ED in 2016 and 2017. As set out in the Action Plan, the Police would further extend the victim screening mechanism to cover all 24 police districts and relevant units. This has already been implemented in July 2018. At the same time, C&ED has also implemented the screening mechanism department-wide. Under the mechanism, the Police, ImmD and C&ED officers will conduct screenings on vulnerable persons (for example, illegal immigrants, sex workers, illegal workers, FDHs, imported workers, etc., as well as suspected victims in other cases) who are arrested or who report themselves as victims to the authorities. LD also plans to implement an initial victim screening mechanism in the second half of 2019 in the branch offices of its Labour Relations Division for early identification of FDHs potentially being exploited or abused when they make employment claims at LD. For those FDHs who may face greater dangers (e.g. being physically abused), LD will refer their cases to relevant law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for investigation as soon as possible.

As the victim identification mechanism has been gradually extended to various LEAs, the number of persons screened under the mechanism has increased by 87 per cent, from 2 515 in 2016 to 4 710 in 2017. During the first 11 months of 2018, 6 778 persons were screened under the mechanism, representing another 57 per cent increase compared with the corresponding period in 2017.

2. Strengthen investigation and prosecution: The HKSARG has continued to strengthen efforts in this area. As set out in the Action Plan, the Police have already appointed designated teams to handle cases relating to TIP and exploitation of FDHs. Other relevant departments have also planned to set up designated teams in 2019. The "Inter-departmental Joint Investigation Team" (JIT), comprising the Police, ImmD, C&ED and LD, continues to meet regularly to discuss latest TIP trends and enforcement measures against TIP crimes, exchange intelligence, and conduct joint investigations. To further enhance the effectiveness of joint investigations, JIT developed an inter-departmental joint investigation mechanism to deal with relevant cases.

As regards prosecution, a new section on "Human Exploitation Cases" has been incorporated into the Prosecution Code issued by DoJ in 2013 to highlight the identification of such cases and broad principles on their

handling, having regard to applicable international standards and practices. A new chapter on "Human Exploitation" is further added to the Prosecution Manual 2017 for the purpose of providing guidance to prosecutors on TIP issues.

1.4.5 Enhance protection and support to victims: The HKSARG has been providing comprehensive and humanitarian protection, support and assistance to victims of trafficking. Depending on the circumstances of individual cases, such protection and support provided by the HKSARG may include:

- (a) witness protection programme;
- (b) shelter, medical services, psychological support, counselling and financial assistance, etc.;
- (c) publicly-funded interpretation during enquiry, investigation and court proceedings (including in the Labour Tribunal);
- (d) financial assistance to enable victims residing overseas to return to Hong Kong to testify as witnesses (covering expenses including accommodation, passage, daily subsistence and visa processing fees, etc.);
- (e) request for overseas LEAs to provide assistance to victims and families in their home country;
- (f) visa extension and waiver of visa fees for victims who need to stay in Hong Kong to act as prosecution witnesses in legal proceedings instituted by the Police, ImmD or LD;
- (g) exceptional approval for FDHs to change employer while in Hong Kong when there is evidence suggesting that they are being exploited or abused by their employers; and
- (h) depending on the facts and circumstances of individual cases and subject to pre-conditions being satisfied, when the situation so warrants, DoJ will grant victims immunity from prosecution for crimes committed as a result of being trafficked or exploited.

1.4.6 Strengthen training: The HKSARG has all along been providing relevant training to officers of LEAs, LD, SWD and prosecutors of DoJ. The number of officials receiving such training has been increasing over the years. During the first 11 months of 2018, over 2 000 officials from the Security Bureau and LEAs, DoJ, LD and SWD, the Hospital Authority and the CEASE Crisis Centre (Note 1) received local or overseas TIP-related training. Among them, the Hospital Authority and the CEASE Crisis Centre participated in such anti-TIP training for the first time. Meanwhile, LEAs continued to actively participate in international or regional conferences and workshops to identify the best practice against TIP. Besides, the HKSARG continues to foster closer partnership with other stakeholders. Last year, the HKSARG actively participated in TIP-related campaigns organised by civil society and other sectors of the community, including the "Launch of the Handbook on Initial Victim Identification and Assistance for Trafficked Persons" and the "International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking 2018", etc.

1.4.7 Recommendations regarding enactment of comprehensive legislation prohibiting TIP: We kept explaining to relevant UN committees that the laws in Hong Kong are sufficient. There are over 50 legal provisions against various TIP conducts, including physical abuse, false imprisonment, criminal

intimidation, unlawful custody of personal valuables, child abduction, child pornography and exploitation of children, illegal employment, etc. Some of these offences attract penalty of up to life imprisonment, forming a comprehensive package of legal provisions against these crimes (a list of these offences is at Annex). Under our existing legislative framework, LEAs may resort to powers and rely on offences provided in different statutes in the course of their investigation, enforcement and prosecution, so that they can cover all nature of crimes involved, subject to individual case details and evidence. This flexibility equips LEAs with more tools and tactics to tackle TIP depending on the details of individual cases, rather than relying on a single piece of TIP legislation. We will continue to brief the society and counterparts on our situation.

¼Recommendations relating to the Palermo Protocol (Note 2): We kept explaining to relevant UN committees that although the Palermo Protocol does not apply to Hong Kong, our existing legislative framework above covers a wide range of conducts of TIP as defined in the Palermo Protocol. The unique situation of Hong Kong – a large population in a small area, a very high population density, a liberal visa regime, a vibrant economy, a transportation network well connected with the rest of the world – makes us vulnerable to the ill impacts on our effective immigration control if the Palermo Protocol (especially provisions permitting TIP victims to remain) is fully applied to Hong Kong, leading to various social and security issues, including similar situations as non-refoulement claimants and other illegal immigrants and overstayers being stranded for a long period of time here. The current situation also reflects that our policies and measures in place are effective and appropriate. As such, we must strike a balance.

¼Strengthen protection of FDHs and regulation of employment agencies (EAs): The HKSARG has all along been firmly committed to protecting FDHs' employment rights and benefits and strengthening the support provided to them, and does not tolerate any abuse of FDHs. LD has been enhancing, through a series of publicity and education work, FDHs' awareness of their rights and benefits and channels for seeking assistance, such as through distributing information packs via non-governmental organisations to FDHs arriving at the Hong Kong airport, staging information kiosks at popular gathering places of FDHs on their rest days, publishing promotional materials, and producing promotional videos, etc. LD also maintains close collaboration with the governments of FDH-sending countries and their consulates-general in Hong Kong, and regularly participates in the welcoming programmes organised by the consulates of major FDH-sending countries in order to enhance the awareness of newly-arrived FDHs about their statutory rights and benefits as well as the channels for seeking assistance. In terms of regulation of EAs, the Employment (Amendment) Ordinance 2018 came into effect in February 2018. It seeks to provide better protection to job seekers (including FDHs) by substantially increasing the penalties on EAs overcharging job seekers or operating without a licence; and widening the scope of the overcharging offence to include (in addition to the licensee) the management as well as persons employed by EAs. LD will continue to enhance the promotion of employment rights and benefits to FDHs and step up enforcement and prosecution against unscrupulous EAs.

(2) and (6) The HKSARG noted the TIP Reports issued by the US Department of State. In the past few years, the TIP report criticized Hong Kong incorrectly and treated Hong Kong unfairly. The HKSARG disagrees with the Report's comments and gradings on Hong Kong. We have already expressed our objection to the US side. The US Department of State has all along ignored the HKSARG's resolve and efforts in combatting TIP. It failed in offering any objective or fair comments on the works done by Hong Kong in combatting TIP and protecting FDHs against exploitation. Recent TIP Reports even contained unsubstantiated allegations and biased criticisms.

As mentioned above, the victim identification mechanism has been gradually extended to various LEAs, and the number of persons screened under the mechanism has increased significantly. During the first 11 months of 2018, only around 0.2 per cent of those screened (15 persons) were identified as victims. This reinforces the fact that TIP is not prevalent in Hong Kong. However, the US Department of State has been interpreting the low victim figure as ineffectiveness of the HKSARG in victim identification. This analysis was simply illogical.

The HKSARG has all along been doing what we consider necessary and effective in combatting TIP, but not in response to the grading given by any other country. Although our continuous efforts in this regard have not received fair comments, the HKSARG will continue, as in the past, to take forward the Action Plan and strive to combat TIP crimes.

(3) In order to take forward various measures set out in the Action Plan, necessary resources have already been set aside under the existing mechanism for relevant departments to strengthen the overall strategy and specific measures in combatting TIP, including victim identification, investigation, enforcement, prosecution, victim protection and support, public education and partnership with different stakeholders, etc.

(4) and (5) Since promulgation of the Action Plan, relevant bureaux/departments (B/Ds) have been taking forward the implementation of measures set out in the Action Plan.

Apart from measures in strengthening the protection of FDHs as mentioned in Part (1) above, LD has also set up a dedicated 24-hour hotline to provide support to FDHs. The hotline began operation on December 19, 2018, providing interpretation service in seven languages (namely Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, Nepali, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu). In addition, LD also provides a dedicated email account (fdh@labour.gov.hk) and an online form on its dedicated FDH Portal (www.fdh.labour.gov.hk) to facilitate FDHs to make enquiries about their employment matters in Hong Kong and file complaints.

The HKSARG will also continue to foster closer partnership with other stakeholders, to actively participate in TIP-related campaigns organised by civil society and other sectors of the community and meet with various non-governmental organisations to exchange views on anti-TIP works. Moreover, we will continue to provide relevant training to officers of LEAs, LD, SWD and

prosecutors of DoJ to maintain their awareness and alertness on TIP.

The Steering Committee will regularly review the implementation of the Action Plan and its effectiveness by analysing the relevant statistical data, the operational experience of various B/Ds, as well as feedback from the civil society, etc. to ensure that the strategic measures in place are effective in dealing with the situation in Hong Kong.

Note 1: The CEASE Crisis Centre, operated by non-governmental organisation, provides crisis intervention and support services which aims to serve victims of sexual violence and individuals/families encountering domestic violence or other family crises. The support services include 24-hour hotline service, outreaching service and short-term accommodation service. The CEASE Crisis Centre is one of the designated crisis intervention and support services centre for handling TIP victim cases and such services are fully funded by the SWD.

Note 2: That's the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

LCQ16: Measures to assist persons with disabilities in securing employment

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-chun and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

The results of a number of studies conducted in recent years have shown that the underemployment situation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) has not improved over the years, and that PWDs often can only secure low-skilled jobs even if they are university degree holders. Regarding the various measures implemented by the Government to assist PWDs in securing employment, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of participants of the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by the age group to which the participants belonged, their type of disability, as well as the service operator providing training and counselling services), and among such participants, the respective numbers of those who participated in the Programme through referral and who successfully secured employment; the average number of months of post-placement service received by the

participants who successfully secured employment;

(2) of the number of participants of the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by the age group to which the participants belonged, type of mental illness they suffered, as well as the service operator providing employment training services), and among such participants, the respective numbers of those who participated in the Programme through referral and who successfully secured employment; the average number of months of post-placement service received by the participants who successfully secured employment;

(3) of the number of organisations participating in the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme and the number of PWDs who secured employment under the Scheme in the past five years (with a breakdown by type of disability of the employees), and their average employment period;

(4) of the number of applications received under the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities, and a breakdown by uses of the amount of subsidy granted, as well as (i) the average subsidy amount of and (ii) the average processing time taken for each approved application, in the past five years;

(5) of the respective numbers of (i) existing and (ii) newly recruited government employees with disabilities, as well as their percentages in the total number of government employees, in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by recruiting government department, type of disability of the employees and whether their disabilities were caused by work injuries;

(6) whether it knows the number of PWDs employed in the past five years by organisations participating in the Talent-Wise Employment Charter (Charter), and a breakdown of such number by employment period, as well as breakdowns by name of organisation, whether the organisation was a public or private one and type of disability of such employees; and

(7) given that the Government has in the past resolved to enact the Minimum Wage Ordinance (Cap. 608) on the basis that the Wage Protection Movement was ineffective, and that currently there are comments alleging that the Charter is ineffective, whether the Government will establish a mandatory quota system for employing PWDs in place of the non-binding Charter; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, I provide a consolidated reply to the Hon Shiu Ka-chun's question as follows:

(1) The number of participants of the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities (OJT) and the number of participants who successfully secured employment after training in each of the past five years are set out in Table 1 in the Annex. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) does

not have information from individual organisations on the age of participants, the type of disability involved, the operators providing the services, or the average number of months of post-placement service provided for OJT participants.

(2) The number of participants of the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities (Sunnyway) and the number of participants who successfully secured employment in each of the past five years are set out in Table 2 in the Annex. The SWD does not have information from individual organisations on the age of participants, the type of mental illness involved, the operators providing the services, or the average number of months of post-placement service provided for Sunnyway participants.

(3) The Labour Department (LD) implements the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage employers to hire job seekers with disabilities and provide them with coaching and support through the provision of an allowance. There were 396, 364, 383, 376 and 391 organisations participating in the WOPS and employing persons with disabilities in the past five years respectively. During the same period, the LD recorded 661, 805, 811, 816 and 802 placements under the WOPS respectively. Breakdowns of WOPS placements by type of disability suffered by job seekers and employment period are set out in Table 3 and Table 4 in the Annex.

(4) The Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities was launched in June 2013. The number of applications received and the total amount of funding granted in each of the past five years are set out in Table 5 in the Annex. In the past five years, 91.3 per cent of the approved applications were for purchase of assistive devices, 7 per cent for workplace modification while 1.7 per cent involved both purchase of assistive devices and workplace modification. Normally, the applicant and referring organisations will be informed of the result of application in writing within three months after the application deadline.

(5) There is no requirement for applicants for government jobs and serving officers to declare their disabilities, if any. The situation of persons with disabilities employed in the civil service is known to the Civil Service Bureau on the basis of information available to bureaux/departments (e.g. through requests of applicants during the recruitment process for special arrangements for selection interview/test having regard to their disabilities, or applications from serving officers with disabilities for financial assistance to purchase technical aids to assist in their performance of duties). According to the relevant information, the number of civil servants who declared their disabilities to the Government and the number of new recruits who declared their disabilities to the Government during the recruitment process, as well as their percentages in the strength of the civil service in each of the past five years, broken down by type of disability (Note) and bureau/department, are set out in Table 6 to Table 9 in the Annex. The Government does not collect statistics on civil servants who became disabled due to injury on duty.

(6) The Talent-Wise Employment Charter and Inclusive Organisations Recognition Scheme is a publicity and public education programme aiming to

encourage through awards the business sector, public bodies, subvented organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as government departments to adopt various measures to promote internship and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. These measures include not only directly employing persons with disabilities by employer organisations, but also using products or services provided by rehabilitation social enterprises, and setting aside shops or stalls for social enterprises or self-employed persons with disabilities to run business or sell their products. As at December 2018, 247 public and government-subvented organisations and 363 private organisations participated in the scheme. Given the nature of the scheme, the Labour Welfare Bureau does not require the participating organisations to provide information on the number of persons with disabilities employed by them.

(7) The Government's policy objectives are to provide skill training and support services for persons with disabilities to enable them to take up productive and gainful employment in the open market on the basis of their abilities rather than disabilities; provide assistance for employers; and strive to promote an inclusive society. Establishing a mandatory employment quota system for persons with disabilities to require enterprises to employ a certain number or percentage of persons with disabilities may create a negative labelling effect on these persons, which is not conducive to their integration into the community. At present, the Government has no plan to introduce such a system for persons with disabilities. The Government will continue to implement various measures to promote employment of persons with disabilities, including providing vocational rehabilitation and training services for them, providing job matching services in the open market for them, offering financial incentives to encourage employers to hire them, enhancing their abilities, strengthening the support for them, and promoting an inclusive culture. The Government also offers grants for NGOs to set up social enterprises with a view to creating more employment and on-the-job training opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Note: Excluding persons with colour blindness or defective colour perception.

[HKMA holds high-level Fintech Roundtable \(with photo\)](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) today (January 9) held a high-level Fintech Roundtable, which was attended by about 45 senior representatives from six international organisations and around 30 central banks or regulatory authorities in 18 jurisdictions.

The Roundtable facilitated exchange of ideas and discussions on current fintech topics which are of mutual interests. It also aimed to strengthen cross-border fintech collaboration among jurisdictions in order to promote innovation and technology adoption that would bring greater convenience, efficiency and security to the public and at the same time ensure financial stability.

Titled "From Mutual Understanding to Global Collaboration", the Roundtable comprised presentations and panel discussions that covered a range of topics including case studies of cross-border collaborations, open banking, and the use of emerging technologies in providing financial services. Participants discussed issues that merit each other's attention and shared their experience and insights into these topics.

Deputy Chief Executive of the HKMA, Mr Howard Lee, said, "One of the key characteristics of fintech is that it is borderless. As fintech develops, cross-border issues are likely to gain importance. It is therefore crucial that we deepen mutual understanding and step up global collaboration to ensure a well-functioning financial system. Today's Roundtable demonstrates the HKMA's commitment in this regard. I am pleased to see the positive outcome of the event and the strong support we received from the participants. The HKMA will continue to foster cross-border fintech collaboration and facilitate the creation of a conducive ecosystem for fintech innovation."

The HKMA will also host a two-day Financial Stability Board Financial Innovation Network meeting on January 10 and 11, immediately after the Roundtable.



[LCQ11: Development of local tourism industry](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Claudia Mo and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the

Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

The Financial Secretary said last month that visitor arrivals in 2018 would exceed 60 million, breaking the record of 2014. Regarding the local tourism industry, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of (i) overnight visitors to Hong Kong, (ii) same-day visitors to Hong Kong and (iii) all visitors to Hong Kong respectively, of their overall numbers and annual growth rates and, among them, the relevant figures respectively for those who came from the Mainland and other places, in each of the years from 2013 to 2018 (set out in tables of the same format as the table below);

(i) Overnight visitors to Hong Kong

Year	Overall		From the Mainland		From other places	
	Number of arrivals	Annual growth rate	Number of arrivals	Annual growth rate	Number of arrivals	Annual growth rate
2013						
2014						
2015						
2016						
2017						
2018						

(2) whether there was an increase in the number of visitors to Hong Kong in the past three months as compared with the preceding three months; if so, of the markets with the major growth; whether it has studied the reasons for the growth in the number of visitors, and whether those reasons include the recent commissioning of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) and the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link;

(3) of the visitor throughput of the various boundary control points in each month of last year;

(4) as the Financial Secretary pointed out last month that to continuously strengthen the tourism industry is an integral part of the Government to "stabilise the economy", of the new measures put in place by the Government to balance the economic contributions made by the tourism industry and its impact on the daily lives of members of the public;

(5) whether it will roll out new measures in the coming three months to alleviate the problem of an excessive number of visitors in Tung Chung caused by the commissioning of HZMB;

(6) whether it will consider setting up a steering committee led by the Chief Secretary for Administration to take charge of the co-ordination among the various policy bureaux and government departments on handling and following up the impacts of visitors on people's livelihood, as well as formulating mitigation measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(7) whether it will discuss with the Central Authorities the tightening of the Individual Visit Scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(8) as the Financial Secretary indicated last month that the Government would consider relaxing the visa arrangements for residents of the Belt and Road countries and regions to visit Hong Kong, of the Belt and Road countries and regions with which the Government is holding or plans to hold discussions on the relevant arrangements, as well as the details of the discussions?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism industry. Whilst ensuring the industry's stable and orderly growth, we also seek to minimise as far as possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community. With the relevant bureaux and departments consulted, our reply to the question raised by the Hon Claudia Mo is set out below.

(1) The figures and the annual growth rate of overnight, same-day, and overall visitor arrivals to Hong Kong provided by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), as well as the breakdown of number of visitors from the Mainland and non-Mainland source markets, are at Annex I.

(2) and (3) The number of visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during September to November 2018 increased by about 500 000 as compared to that during June to August, and increased by about 11.5 per cent as compared to the same period in 2017. Among them, the number of arrivals in October and November 2018 grew by 11.5 per cent and 20.6 per cent over a year earlier respectively, while those from the Mainland surged by 15.4 per cent and 25.8 per cent respectively. These show that the rise of Mainland visitor arrivals is the main driver of overall visitor arrival growth after the commencement of services of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) which commenced operation on September 23 and October 24, 2018 respectively. Although the number of visitors using other control points has seemingly declined during the same period, it is likely that some visitors (same-day visitors in particular) came visiting Hong Kong for experiencing the newly opened XRL and HZMB. Whether XRL and HZMB will become the main control points used by new visitors remains to be seen, and the Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The monthly figures of visitor throughput of various boundary control

points in 2018 are provided at Annex II.

(4) In view of the steady growth in overall visitor arrivals to Hong Kong in recent years and the successive commissioning of various cross-boundary infrastructures, the Government has strived to increase and improve Hong Kong's tourism facilities, as well as to enhance the city's tourist-receiving capacity. In the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry published in October 2017, one of the four development strategies therein is to nurture and develop tourism products and initiatives with local and international characteristics to cater for the needs and preferences of different visitor segments, thereby diverting tourists to sightsee and shop in different districts of Hong Kong as planned, and increasing the overall economic benefits brought by the tourism industry to all citizens in Hong Kong.

The Government is developing new tourist attractions and implementing various cultural and creative tourism projects in different districts, as well as promoting green tourism development in New Territories and outlying islands along the principles of nature conservation and sustainable development. Apart from the the revitalisation of Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail completed earlier on and the promotion campaign "Old Town Central" launched by the HKTB, the Government will enhance the appeal of Sham Shui Po and Wan Chai as tourism spots, through collaboration with the Hong Kong Design Centre and the Hong Kong Comics and Animation Federation, by launching the "Design District Hong Kong" project, which comprises public art place-making works, creative tourism events, local comic characters with Hong Kong's originality, multimedia and creative technology, etc. The HKTB also rolled out the "Hong Kong Neighbourhoods – Sham Shui Po" campaign in September 2018, which encourages visitors to explore the district and experience the local culture and characteristics. Besides, a number of facilities in the West Kowloon Cultural District will also be completed in phases in the next few years. This, coupled with HKTB's efforts in promoting various activities in relation to traditional festivals with local distinctive characteristics, can also entice more tourists to patronise different districts of Hong Kong.

In respect of theme parks, the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is taking forward its expansion and development plan. Following the launch of new stage show "Moana: A Homecoming Celebration" last year, the new ride "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle!" will be opened this year. Other attractions will also be completed progressively in the coming years. As regards the Ocean Park, it is taking forward its all-weather water park and two new hotels. Whilst one of the hotels was soft-launched in October 2018, the water park and the other hotel will be completed progressively by 2021.

Furthermore, the Government has been pragmatic in tackling problems brought about by tourist flows in different districts. In view of the inconvenience caused by inbound tour groups to the community, the Government has, in collaboration with the trade, adopted various targeted measures to minimise the impact to the community. Such measures include encouraging tour coaches to use legal parking spaces, appealing to the trade to maintain order when receiving tour groups and make good use of information technology to

strengthen visitor and vehicular flow control, etc. As regards crowd management, in case of tourists crowding up in certain areas, the Police will deploy more manpower on a need basis to maintain public order and public safety, as well as smooth traffic flow thereat.

(5) Since the commissioning of the HZMB, the Government has been monitoring the vehicular and passenger flows crossing the border through the HZMB and the operation of the Hong Kong Port (HKP). The Government has convened several inter-departmental meetings and rolled out various measures within a short period of time to alleviate the pressure on the HKP and areas nearby. The measures include: simplifying the application arrangements for domestic coaches to enter the HKP's designated pick-up areas; launching a pre-booking system for group visitors taking shuttle buses; co-ordinating the local trade in easing the visitor flow near the HKP and encouraging them (including operators of the tourist attractions) to launch travel itineraries and products to help divert tourists; and improving the queuing and boarding/alighting arrangements of Route B6 in Tung Chung, such as arranging passengers to buy return tickets in advance, arranging passengers to get aboard two buses at a time during peak hours, and deploying more staff and mounting railings to facilitate passengers boarding in a swift and orderly manner, in order to minimise the impact on local residents. Moreover, the Police has, depending on the developing crowd situation, suitably deployed additional manpower to maintain public order and public safety on site.

After the implementation of the aforementioned measures, the situation in Tung Chung has improved since late November 2018. Meanwhile, the passenger flow of HZMB in the last weekend of December was almost 30 per cent less than that of the peak in mid-November. To further alleviate the impact of tourist activities on Tung Chung residents, the government departments concerned are actively processing the occupation application of the new public transport interchange (PTI) at Citygate with a view to securing the early completion of the acceptance inspection to provide additional pick-up/ drop-off spaces for use by franchised buses. By the time the PTI is commissioned, the Transport Department (TD) will relocate the bus stop of Route B6 now located in Tung Chung Town Centre to reduce the impact of tourist activities on residents nearby. Furthermore, in view of Islands District Council Members' concerns and suggestions, the TD has looked into and evaluated the proposals of temporary relocation of Route B6 prior to the commissioning of the new PTI. Consultation with the Islands District Council on the evaluation findings is under way.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the various measures and make adjustments as necessary.

(6) High-level tourism co-ordinating meetings are chaired by the Financial Secretary. Two meetings were already convened in 2017 and 2018. At the meetings, the Financial Secretary directed bureaux and departments to drive the implementation of various tourism-related measures in the areas of tourist support and management, planning of tourism facilities and transport support, and tourism diversification through closer co-operation and co-ordination.

The Tourism Commission (TC) will continue to play its role in tourism policy planning and, in accordance with the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry, collaborate with relevant bureaux and departments, as well as different stakeholders including the HKTB and the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, to ensure the industry's stable and orderly growth and seek to minimise as far as possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community at the same time.

(7) The Government attaches great importance to the policy for Mainland tourists to visit Hong Kong as it is crucial to the Government's overall administration and planning. TC will continue to closely monitor the travel patterns of Mainland tourists and maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities on relevant arrangements.

(8) Hong Kong has all along adopted an open immigration policy to facilitate entry of bona-fide visitors. At present, nationals of about 170 foreign countries and territories, including some Belt and Road countries, may visit Hong Kong visa-free.

The Government reviews its visa policy from time to time. Factors to be considered include immigration control and security, bilateral economic, social and cultural ties between Hong Kong and the countries concerned, track records of its nationals visiting Hong Kong and the circumstances of the individual country. In negotiating mutual visa exemption arrangements with the Belt and Road countries, the Government will make holistic consideration with a view to providing more travel convenience to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport holders and genuine visitors to Hong Kong on the one hand, and maintaining effective immigration control on the other.